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UNCLAS HALIFAX 0051

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SUBJECT: U.S. CUSTOMS AT HALIFAX PORT

1. SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED Q ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) officials in Halifax are pleased with the cooperation they have enjoyed over the past year with the U.S. Customs inspectors assigned to work at the Halifax port. Since U.S. Customs began assigning inspectors to Halifax on a rotating basis last March, CCRA has scrutinized nearly 500 U.S.-bound marine shipping containers specifically at the request of their U.S. colleagues, in addition to the 3,000-3,500 containers that CCRA normally inspects for its own reasons. Local CCRA officials would welcome a permanent U.S. Customs presence here. END SUMMARY.

3. On February 25, CG visited the customs facility where two U.S. Customs inspectors are working with their Canadian counterparts in identifying U.S.-bound marine shipping containers that merit closer scrutiny and inspection. Both the U.S. Customs personnel and the CCRA officials with whom they work spoke highly of the collaboration that has evolved since last March, when U.S. first sent two inspectors here. The U.S. Customs inspectors commented that they receive full cooperation from CCRA's container targeting unit and have never had a problem persuading CCRA to inspect a U.S.-bound container at their request. The targeting unit is co-located with the inspection facility.

4. Senior CCRA officials in Halifax have told CG that this arrangement has worked out very well thus far. They noted that it has been beneficial for both sides that the U.S. Customs people have access to a different database and can therefore make slightly different decisions about which containers coming in to Halifax port might be suspicious. They insisted that CCRA is happy to isolate and inspect any container flagged by the U.S. inspectors and that there have been no jurisdictional problems. Since the U.S. inspectors arrived, CCRA has inspected almost 500 U.S.-bound shipping containers at their request. The CCRA officials observed that this statistic compares favorably with those at the ports of Montreal and Vancouver, both of which have a higher volume of U.S.-traffic. Halifax annually inspects a total of over 3,000-3,500 containers that have come to the attention of CCRA or other law-enforcement agencies for various reasons.

5. Our local CCRA contacts believe it would be advantageous if U.S. Customs decided to make its presence at Halifax port permanent. They pointed out that each newly assigned TDY inspector over the past year has had to spend some time developing the necessary personal working relationships with Canadian counterparts, as well as having to undergo a certain learning curve with regard to CCRA practices and procedures. Assigning U.S. Customs people here on a more permanent basis would solve this problem. Co-locating U.S. inspectors with the Canadian targeting/inspection unit makes sense, they argued, and might be even more feasible on a long-term basis once the unit moves to a new, larger facility this spring.

KASHKETT